Executive Summary

Supported by Cooperative Agreement #2003-HS-WX-K041 by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), Abt Associates Inc. conducted a study of seven components of School Resource Officer (SRO) program operations that many programs have experienced difficulty addressing:

• recruiting SROs,

• screening SROs,

• retaining SROs,

• training SROs,

• supervising SROs,

• identifying sources of program funding, and

• maintaining program funding.

Information for the report comes principally from in-depth interviews with program supervisors, SROs, law enforcement administrators, school administrators, school board members, and local government officials conducted during site visits to 28 well-regarded programs. Additional information, was obtained from follow-up telephone calls to program participants and a review of program materials.

The report has been written for:

• first-line SRO program supervisors;

• police and sheriff's department administrators interested in improving their SRO programs;

• school administrators with SRO programs already in their schools; and

• law enforcement and school district personnel considering starting an SRO program.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Many SRO programs have experienced difficulty recruiting, screening, retaining, training, and supervising SROs. Many programs have also had problems maintaining funding over time. This report documents promising methods that selected SRO programs have used to address these potential problem areas of SRO program operations. The information in the report is intended to enable other SRO programs—and jurisdictions that are thinking of starting SRO programs—***to benefit from the experiences of these selected programs by adopting or adapting some of their approaches to solving obstacles in these seven areas***.

The chapter summaries below present the policy recommendations from each chapter. However, ***the summaries omit the detailed examples of how specific programs have implemented the recommendations*** that the individual chapters—and the case studies that follow most of the chapters—provide. As a result, while readers will find the executive summary a useful "road map" of how to address each of the seven problem areas the report focuses on, only by reading the chapters and case studies can readers find out about ***the specific steps well-regarded programs have actually taken for addressing these stumbling blocks to success***. In short, the full text of the chapters lends credibility to the recommendations in the executive summary as well as provides the particulars about how to go about putting the recommendations into practice.

Chapter 2   Recruiting SROs

In order to recruit the best possible candidates—and have an adequate pool of applicants from which to choose—make sure that all eligible officers and deputies in the agency learn about the position and are aware not only of its attractions but also its drawbacks.

Follow Three Basic Guidelines

Information from the program studied suggests three principal guidelines for recruiting SROs:

(1)   Do not assign officers involuntarily to be SROs; solicit volunteers for the position. Program participants report that ***allowing officers to volunteer to serve as SROs results in a higher level of commitment to the program***.

(2)   **Use more than one approach** for posting the assignment, such as:

• e-mail;

• mailboxes;

• roll call;

• bulletin boards;

• open houses and trainings; and

• personal invitations.

> The program in Garner, North Carolina, provides candidates who qualify as SROs—but were outscored by other applicants—with their final screening results, as well as an analysis of their performance and strategies, so they can improve their scores if they reapply.

(3) Provide information about the position and screening process **with the posting**, including:

• eligibility criteria;

• attractive features of the position;

• the screening process; and

• important features of the job.

Consider Using Incentives to Attract Candidates

To attract the most qualified candidates and to get a large enough pool of candidates, **highlight the incentives inherent in the position**, such as being able to:

• have weekends and holidays off, and work only days;

• work with kids;

• be able to make a difference in the lives of students;

> SRO José Cuellar with the Palm Beach County, Florida, School District Police Department said, "I've always been interested in working with kids because of the opportunity to save some along the way. On the street, it's a revolving door—the same drunks and prostitutes. In school, you can save a few kids."

• have some independence from close supervision; and

• experience new and challenging work.

Consider offering **additional** incentives, including:

• take-home cruisers;

• extra pay; and

• improved promotional opportunities.

> The Tucson Police Department found that providing a five percent increase in SRO base pay and giving SROs take-home cruisers increased the program's applicant pool.

Neutralize Real and Perceived Disincentives to the Posting

At the same time, take steps to **neutralize the disincentives** to the position that may discourage some officers from applying, such as:

> The Maury County, Tennessee, Sheriff's Department allows SROs to build up "comp" time and then take off July and half of August.

• having to teach (tell them you will train them to teach);

• being seen as a "Kiddie Cop" (explain how many arrests SROs make, sometimes for serious offenses; reassign them to patrol duty in the summer);

• being confined to a campus (explain that SROs have responsibilities outside the schools and, while in school, experience a tremendous amount of diverse stimulation);

• working after hours (arrange for long summer breaks); and

• isolation from the department (keep SROs involved in the agency).

In summary, address disincentives in three ways:

(1)   When the disincentive reflects a misconception, **spread the truth about the program**.

(2)   When the disincentive is real but modifiable, **change it**.

(3)   When the disincentive is indisputable and unalterable, **offset the draw-backs to the position by compensating for them and by publicizing the position's significant attractive features**.

Chapter 3   Screening SROs

As with many occupations, *the qualifications and the personality of the SRO are likely to make or break the program*. As a result, many program participants suggest that the single most important component of an SRO program may be implementing an effective process for screening candidates for the position.

Develop and Apply Formal Screening Criteria

Begin by establishing written criteria for selecting candidates. *Review and refine four essential characteristics and experience* that SROs, program supervisors, and school administrators say any officer should have in order to be considered for the position:

• *likes kids*, wants to work with kids, and is able to work with kids;

• *has the right demeanor* and "people skills," including being

> Sergeant Paul Marchand, the program supervisor with the Salem, New Hampshire, Police Department, warns that "SROs are a special breed; you have to take lot of guff. You need a temperament that doesn't get easily fired up and has patience."

    – calm,
    – approachable,
    – able to put up gracefully with guff from kids, and
    – patient;

• *has experience* as a patrol officer or road deputy; and

• *has* above average *integrity*.

There are four other criteria that, if candidates cannot meet them before they are assigned to the schools, programs can—and must—teach or instill in them shortly after the officers have been appointed:

• willingness to *work very hard*;

• exceptional *dependability*;

> According to Sergeant Richard Davies, supervisor of the Pine Bluff, Arkansas, program, "Applicants have to have an above average attendance record—SROs have to be in school."

• teaching ability; and

• ability to work *independently*.

Consider giving "extra points" to candidates who are familiar with juvenile law, write excellent reports, have some college experience, or have ties to the local community (for example, went to school there).

Implement a Thorough Screening Process

Programs that have been able to assign SROs who function well in the position and remain in it happily for several years have generally used multiple screening procedures, such as the following:

- *require a memorandum of interest or letter* and identify specific topics applicants must address (e.g., experience working with youth);

- talk with current and previous *supervisors* about the applicant's suitability (is the person dependable?);

> Lieutenant Greg Harrison with the Lenoir County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office, reported that "patrol deputies think the SRO assignment is 'a piece of cake' and are surprised when I tell them what they will have to do in the schools—which often dissuades them from applying."

- inform candidates candidly about the *job requirements—and drawbacks* (to weed out inappropriate officers);

- examine *personnel files* (e.g., for disciplinary history);

- factor in *personal experience* with the candidate; and

- check for signs of *enthusiasm* for the position.

Consider assembling an oral interview panel. *Oral boards offer significant benefits over one-on-one interviews for assessing candidates*, including examining candidates under stress, assessing their communication skills, and checking "body language." In using an oral interview panel, consider carefully:

- *who* sits on the panel (include at least one school district representative);

- what *questions* panel members will ask (e.g., is the candidate willing to work overtime? what strategies would he or she use for handling difficult school administrators?);

- requiring candidates to *respond to hypothetical—or real—situations* in the schools that are problematic for SROs (e.g., a student says there are drugs in another student's locker—what do you do?);

- *"body language"* and what it might indicate about a candidate; and

- how to *rate* or score the candidate's performance.

Involve school administrators in the screening process. Program participants consistently report that including principals and assistant principals in the process helps match SROs properly with individual schools and increases acceptance of the program and the SROs among school personnel. The most common way of involving school administrators is through participation on oral interview panels.

> Sergeant Patricia Heffner, who supervises the Lakewood, Colorado, Police Department's program, admitted that the police department had originally not been keen on involving school personnel in the screening process but sees the value now. "By participating, the school administrators are 'buying' into their SRO—and they have less room to complain if it does not end up working out."

Implement several screening methods. Most screening approaches are not redundant—rather, they complement one another. Individually, each one can reveal only certain things about a candidate; taken together, they improve the chances of learning as much as possible about an applicant.

Chapter 4   Minimizing Turnover Among SROs

Many programs have problems with turnover among SROs. Minimizing turnover is important because *replacing an SRO makes the program less effective for several months and even years* as the new officer learns how to do the job, comes to understand the school's culture and operations, and builds trust among school administrators, faculty, and students.

Become familiar with the many problems that can contribute to turnover—even among SROs who are performing well—and become knowledgeable about how to solve them.

Problem: Being unsuitable as SROs from the beginning
Solutions: *Recruit, screen, train, and supervise SROs carefully*.

Problem: Conflict with school administrators
Solution: *Work with the SRO—and with administrators—to solve the problem*.

- involve school administrators in the SRO selection process

- orient new SROs to working with principals and assistant principals

- meet with administrators before problems develop

- define each party's responsibilities in writing

- if all else fails, allow SROs to transfer to another school

Problem: Feeling isolated from the rest of the department
Solution: ***Take steps to keep SROs integrated with the rest of the
department***.

> Program supervisors in the Chula Vista, California, Police Department require SROs to go to the day shift patrol roll call every Wednesday morning to help them stay involved with the department.

- encourage or require SROs to go back to patrol during the summer

- require SROs to attend roll call at least periodically

- involve SROs in departmentwide training

- encourage SROs to take the initiative to remain in touch with other officers

- single out effective SROs for department wide commendation

Problem: Perception of the position as a dead end
Solution: ***Turn the position into an asset for gaining promotion***.

Problem: Lack of excitement
Solution: ***Introduce strategies to keep the job stimulating***.

- allow SROs to remain—or become—members of other units—for example, the SWAT team

- give SROs new, rewarding, and challenging assignments (one program assigned a program supervisor and an SRO to work with county architects to ensure student safety in the design of new school buildings)

- encourage SROs to seek out interesting challenges on their own (e.g., conduct school safety surveys and report weaknesses to school administrators; start a Youth Crime Watch program)

- send SROs for training and other forms of professional development

Problem: Too much teaching
Solutions: ***Train SROs in how to be effective teachers and, when necessary, encourage them to reduce the amount of time they are spending in the classroom***.

Problem: Burnout
Solution: ***Help SROs to reduce their workload***.

> The Boone, North Carolina, Police Department trained two patrol officers as half-time back-ups to the single SRO in the department.

- provide strategic breaks from work

- give SROs preferred summer assignments

- determine ways of lightening their workload (e.g., cover fewer after-school events)

Problem: Losing SROs to mandatory rotation
Solution: ***Make exceptions to the policy for SROs who are performing well and want to remain in the schools***.

Program supervisors and SROS alike report that ***the most effective approach to reducing turnover is to implement a number of complementary steps designed to keep the officers satisfied with the position and to provide an early warning of any discontent***.

Chapter 5   Training SROs

> A former SRO and current program supervisor said, "They [the department] put the SROs in the schools the first year with no formal training, so the first year was not productive."

SROs need training before and after they go into the schools.

Provide Pre-Service Training
While SROs can learn or hone certain skills only on the job,
training new SROs before they go on the job is essential so that SROs do not:

- avoid certain responsibilities (e.g., teaching) and

- perform poorly or make serious mistakes that can set back their relationships with students and school administrators for months.

Identify Topics that Pre-Service Training Needs to Address
Typically, before they go into the schools SROs need to be trained to:

- teach;

- mentor and counsel;

- work collaboratively with school administrators;

> Sergeant Richard Davies, program supervisor in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, pointed out, "You can't go into class and look stupid, so you need to develop basic lesson plans to show to the principal so you can cover yourself and so you won't fumble in class."

- manage their time; and

- apply juvenile statutes and case law.

In addition, consider training new SROs in child development and psychology; handling especially difficult students; the policies, procedures, and culture of the schools to which they will be assigned; and the preparation of safe school plans.

Find Ways of Providing Timely Training

When basic SRO training courses are not available from national training organizations before new SROs go into the schools, **explore other means of providing training**.

• Delay sending SROs into the schools until training is available.

• Seek timely training from other professional organizations, such as State agencies, technical schools, schools of criminal justice, and State SRO associations.

• Develop in-house training expertise.

• Send SROs to the general instructors' school at the training academy or for Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) certification.

> The Scottsdale, Arizona, Police Department, arranged for two SROs to become certified SRO instructors so they can train new SROs at almost any time.

• Provide in-house orientation on SRO roles and responsibilities.

Arrange for New SROs to Shadow Experienced SROs

Require every new SRO to spend at least several days shadowing an experienced SRO. If there are no other SROs in the program, arrange for new SROs to shadow experienced SROs in another community. Consider providing formal field training by field training officers, using checklists of what the new SROs need to learn and formal written evaluations of their progress.

Two Final—but Important—Guidelines

> Because his program was brand new, Robert Yant, the Marshall, Minnesota, chief of police, sent his first SRO to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to shadow that jurisdiction's experienced SRO. According to Jim Marshall, the new SRO, "The experience was invaluable."

• **Implement as many pre-service training approaches as possible**, in particular, thorough orientation to the program and shadowing experienced SROs, because the various training strategies are not mutually exclusive but rather complement one another.

• **Involve school administrators** in the training.

Provide In-Service Training

Provide in-service training on issues of importance to SROs and school administrators to:

• upgrade their skills and knowledge;

• demonstrate that the position is an important one that the department values; and

• reduce department liability.

Offer SROs—or require them to take advantage of:

• regular program meetings at which supervisors or outside experts give presentations;

• semi-annual and annual training updates; and

• periodic off-site conferences and courses (often free or inexpensive).

> The Maury County program in Tennessee sends all its SROs every summer to the Tennessee School Resource Officers Association week-long conference.

Chapter 6   Supervising SROS

Despite the misperception by a few programs that careful supervision of SROs is not necessary, most program supervisors recognize the need to monitor their SROs conscientiously.

Exercise Careful Supervision Despite Obstacles

Many program supervisors report that supervising SROs properly can be difficult if:

• supervisors lack time because of other department commitments; and

• there are long distances between schools or a large number of participating schools.

Despite these barriers, *find ways to adequately supervise SROs* in order to:

• obtain information from SROs and school administrators that may point to a possible problem before it develops;

• identify signs of poor performance before school administrators have to bring it to the supervisor's attention;

• show SROs that the department values their work and they have its support;

• identify disaffection and burnout early to minimize turnover; and

• demonstrate to school administrators that the agency considers the program an important collaborative initiative.

> In a county in which supervisors trusted the SROs to be in their schools (and assumed administrators would call them if they were not), one SRO was regularly leaving school for a tryst. The discovery created very bad publicity for the department.

Even when programs assign independent, mature officers as SROs, do not assume they need little supervision. In addition, **do not wait for school administrators to bring problems with SROs to the program's attention**.

Develop a Plan for Supervising SRO Performance

Effective supervision of SROs depends on a clear understanding among program participants of the officers' roles and responsibilities—typically spelled out in a memorandum of agreement or contract between the parties. Otherwise, supervisors do not know what they are supposed to be evaluating in the officers' behavior. In addition:

• do not rely on the evaluation criteria used for patrol officers; instead, tailor the evaluation criteria to what SROs do; and

• involve school administrators in the SROs' performance review—they have considerably more contact with the officers than do agency supervisors and, as a collaborative initiative, they should be involved anyway.

Implement Several Supervisory Approaches
Program participants suggest that no single method of supervision will be adequate; instead, they recommend implementing as many of the following methods as possible:

• review SRO activity logs on a regular basis;

• review SRO case or arrest reports;

> After a lewd and indecent incident at a school in Sarasota County, Florida, the SRO documented in his log that he had submitted a report to the school. According to the SRO, "When Captain [Tim] Carney [the supervisor] read my log, he wanted to know why I hadn't submitted a police report."

• host regular meetings with SROs as a group;

• visit the school campus;

• maintain telephone or radio communication;

- survey students;

- survey teachers; and

- formally evaluate SRO performance, preferably at least twice a year.

Select the Supervisors Carefully
In addition to arranging for supervisors to spend enough time monitoring the SROs effectively, select supervisors who are qualified to monitor SRO performance, or else train them in how to supervise SROs. Try to select former SROs as supervisors.

Chapter 7   Identifying Sources of Program Funding

At one time, many law enforcement agencies provided all or most of the funding for SRO programs (often through grants from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services). However, as Federal grants have expired and as agencies have experienced funding cutbacks, ***many agencies have increasingly been forced to seek alternative funding sources in order to maintain their programs***.

Develop a Realistic Estimate of Program Costs

An important first decision in making or changing arrangements for funding a program is to get a firm grasp of how much the program actually costs. Costs can vary significantly depending on such considerations as SRO salary levels, fringe benefits, and stipends; time spent on the program by supervisors; and miscellaneous costs such as training, overtime pay, and equipment.

Work With the School District to Share the Program's Costs

Negotiate—and renegotiate as needed—each party's share of the costs. By splitting the cost, neither side feels imposed on, and the cost to each party is considerably reduced. For example, if the school district pays for half of each SRO's nine months of duty in the schools, the law enforcement agency in effect gains an officer for about half price.

> Because of budget cuts to the agency, the Stark County, Ohio, sheriff told the five school districts that he would have to recall their SROs unless the school districts agreed to pay for most of the officers' salaries. Four of the five school districts came up with the funds.

Furthermore, as explained in chapter 8, "Maintaining Program Funding," school district administrators (who typically present a budget to the school board for approval) often feel the program is so beneficial—and that cutting it back or dropping it would be so politically risky—that they are willing to find ways to increase their contribution.

Be Prepared to Find New Sources of Funding

Explore getting additional support especially from local government (city council, mayor, county commissioners). Look into obtaining funding from the Federal Government, businesses, charities, and foundations, and through fund-raising events.

> Captain Mike Rogers of the West Orange Police Department asked the city council for additional funding for the program. By cutting recreation and library expenses, as well as public works, the council was able to approve the increase.

Chapter 8   Maintaining Program Funding

Some agencies believe that, if they run a good program, its funding will never dry up. Certainly, *having an excellent program is the first—and essential—step in ensuring program survival*. However, even many well-run programs have sooner or later experienced the threat—and even the reality—of cutbacks or dissolution. As a result, *constantly take steps to ensure that your sources of funding maintain a strong interest in seeing the program continue*. This requires doing three things:

1. Ensure that every funding source *gains something important from the program*.

2. Make every funding source *aware of the program's activities and achievements*.

3. *Identify possible new funding sources* and court them.

This chapter addresses the first two of these necessities for program survival; chapter 7, "Identifying Sources of Program Funding," addresses the third requirement.

Motivate the Law Enforcement Agency to Maintain Funding
Document the significant benefits the program can provide law enforcement agencies.

• *Prove how the program reduces the burden on patrol officers or road deputies.*

> According to Sergeant Paul Marchand, the program supervisor in Salem, New Hampshire, "We pay for the program because, by assigning officers to the schools, we free up officers on the street. Before we had SROs, we were constantly sending patrol officers to the schools. It makes sense from a deployment point of view to have officers in the schools rather than send over patrol officers whenever there is a problem."

– Compare how many 911 and non-emergency calls for service the schools made before the SROs went into the schools with how many are made today.

– Estimate how many hours the calls would have taken a patrol officer out of service compared with the time the SROs spend in the schools.

• *Show how the program has improved the image of the police among juveniles.*

- *Document how the program has improved the law enforcement agency's relationship with the school district and why this matters*. For example, it can improve collaboration in addressing juvenile crime and truancy.

- *Document how the program benefits the chief or sheriff politically*—for example, improving a chief's chances of reappointment or sheriff's chances of reelection.

Motivate School Districts to Contribute (More) Funding to the Program

Support from school administrators and school board members has been crucial to keeping many programs afloat. But program supervisors must often document and explain how the program provides the schools with significant benefits.

> According to Al Weidner, budget director for the Sarasota County, Florida, school board, "I have never turned down funding for the program … because schools say they don't know how they would function without it. I want to make sure we could not be spending the money on something else and getting a better return on our investment, but principals go out of their way to single out the program to me."

- *Document how the program has increased safety—and the feeling of safety—in the schools.*

  – Calculate how many violent incidents SROs have handled—and prevented.

  – Work with the schools to survey students and teachers about how much safer they feel with an SRO in the schools.

- *Document the number of incidents SROs handle that would have required calling the dispatcher and compare the estimated time of response.*

> After SROs in Stark County, Ohio, targeted the problem of truancy by counseling truant students, meeting with their parents or guardians, and, in some cases, performing home visits, graduation rates for all five districts began to improve markedly.

- *Compare truancy rates at schools before and after SROs were placed in them.*

- *Go the extra mile for school officials.*

  – Agree to reasonable requests for help even if they are outside the contract scope of work.

  – Arrange for SROs, rather than other officers or deputies, to provide security at after-school events.

  – As much as possible, avoid pulling SROs out of the schools when classes are in session.

  – Involve school administrators in program operations, including screening candidates (see chapter 3, "Screening SROs") and evaluating SRO performance (see chapter 6, "Supervising SROs").

Motivate Public Officials

Typically, local public officials decide on the funding for the program either directly or by approving—or adding to—the law enforcement agency's and school district's budgets. Programs have been able to secure the support of mayors, town council members, city managers, and other local officials by making the program too attractive to cut—and too politically risky to drop—because of its ability to protect students. Program participants report that one of the best ways to convince public officials of the program's effectiveness in enhancing student safety is by developing empirical evidence that it works.

- *Examine statistical data to prove what the program has accomplished* by way of reducing crime in the schools, truancy, and discipline rates.

- *Conduct surveys* of students, school administrators, and parents to help convince funding sources to continue their support—or face the community's wrath.

- Require SROs to *document their activities* to show how productive they are.

- *Promote personal experience with the program*—invite school board members to shadow an SRO; ask the superintendent to sit in on a class taught by an SRO.

> An evaluation of the Delaware State Police program commissioned by the State Department of Education in 1998 found that schools that never had an SRO had a statistically significant increase in the number of police charges in 1997-98 compared with 1994-95, while there was no significant increase in schools with SROs. The Department of Education used the findings to support continued and expanded funding of the program by both the legislature and school districts.